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FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

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Family Violence Not Restricted to Towns and Cities

Living in the quiet, peaceful countryside does not guarantee a peaceful home. Violence is a fact of life in many rural families. The problem is often compounded by some of the special circumstances of rural living, such as isolation, lack of public transportation, and party line telephones. Providing services to a thinly scattered population is problematic and expensive.

Three-quarters of Albertans live within a narrow corridor that stretches from Lethbridge to just north of Edmonton. This strip covers only about 10 percent of the total area of the province. The remaining one-quarter of the population is scattered across Alberta. The population density is less than two persons per square kilometer in many areas, and this density is not stable. Rural areas are steadily losing people to urban centres. While Alberta's total population increased by six percent from 1981 to 1986, population in the east and southeast declined, in some areas by as much as 15 percent.

Current difficulties facing the agricultural industry are taking their toll on farm families. Low commodity prices, high operating costs, drought, an overabundance of grain and high debt loads are causing considerable occupational and personal stress. This stress is manifesting itself in an increase in suicides, family violence and other problems.

Although stress contributes to family violence, other factors are involved. For example, some people have an extreme need to be in charge, and will use violence to maintain control. Farm families dealing with violent relationships face unique difficulties, because there are many opportunities to control family members.

Farming is a lifestyle. A farm is both a business and a home. It operates autonomously and is often geographically isolated, making it easier to keep family interaction hidden from outsiders. The family

members are often the farm workers. They are not only subjected to control because of their place in the family, but because they work at home and are dependent on the "head of the household" for such things as wages, status, food and shelter.

Several practical problems contribute to the farm family's isolation. Lack of training and employment opportunities prevents many women and older children from finding employment off the farm. Even if work is available, lack of child care facilities keeps many women at home. The absence of public transportation means travel is dependent on access to farm vehicles. This access is easily controlled. Party line telephones discourage calls for help or information, partly because of a strong belief that family matters are private and should not be disclosed to others, particularly eavesdropping neighbors. Reaching out for assistance usually requires a long-distance telephone call from a rural area. The caller runs the risk of being questioned when the call appears on the phone bill.

Leaving such a situation is difficult and may seem impossible to those involved. Some adolescents choose to run away. The elderly and women with children find that option impractical. One woman described her situation as follows:

"Farm work isn't like city work. My husband wasn't gone from eight in the morning till five at night. He could pop in at any time. He kept a close guard on the pick-up and on my comings and goings. I'd have to ask for the keys. There was just never a safe time to leave."

It's not just the difficulty of getting away that keeps members of farm families trapped in abusive situations. It is the realization that they will, in all likelihood, have to abandon a familiar and sometimes preferred lifestyle. The alternatives available

to them look no better than the situations in which they find themselves. Another woman explained:

"All my friends, relatives, my whole life is at my home. It had to get so damn bad before I could decide to leave all that behind. I don't like the city. I don't know anybody. Now I can't go back. Where would I live? There aren't apartments and welfare housing on the farm. If I go back home, it has to be to him and more beatings. I don't know where to turn."

Deciding where to turn is a problem in many rural areas. Shrinking communities lose services because they are no longer viable. Many professionals are reluctant to take positions in isolated areas because of the lack of colleague support, job opportunities for spouses, social amenities and the long distances that must be travelled to fulfill professional responsibilities.

Creative responses are required to deal with the unique conditions of rural living that can aggravate the already desperate situations of those living with abuse. Several rural communities have examined the problem and have developed a variety of successful initiatives. Some of these are described on page two of this newsletter.

* Excerpts from interviews reported in *Battered But Not Beaten* by Linda MacLeod.

Gerry Kilgannon

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Rural Communities Seeking Solutions

Many Alberta communities have studied aspects of family violence and have identified needs and creative responses. Some of these initiatives and reports of interest are identified below.

- The communities of Flagstaff, Viking, Wainwright and Provost in east-central Alberta joined together in 1986 to study what could be done to provide service to children and their families to protect children from abuse and other negative influences. The study, known as Project Re-Act, pointed out the importance of having programs that are tailor-made for rural needs. Following completion of the project, a Wainwright group home offered to keep a "Safebed" for any young person forced to leave home; a resident social worker was placed in the Family and Community Support Services office in Killam to serve the County of Flagstaff; volunteers were trained to present a sexual abuse prevention program in the schools and Lakeland College developed a training program for family support workers.

For information about "Waves and Ripples: The Final Report of Project



Re-Act," call the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence.

- The Stettler Society for the Prevention of Family Violence undertook a study (see Central Community News, page 3). Copies of the report are available from the society, Box 2097, Stettler, Alberta, T0C 2L0. The society also initiated a series of meetings with

representatives of other communities serving rural areas in east-central Alberta (Camrose, Drumheller and others) to address the problem of child sexual abuse. The group has received funding from a variety of sources to conduct a feasibility study concerning the need for treatment resources.

- The Northern Alberta Development Council paid heed to the many briefs on family violence it was receiving from community groups and prepared a report on what services are needed in northern Alberta. Copies of the report are available from the council, 12323 Stony Plain Road, Edmonton, T5N 2Y9, telephone 422-9176.

- Several rural communities (St. Paul, Fairview, Peace River, Wainwright and Whitecourt) operate crisis lines and can provide short-term, emergency accommodation for abused women and their families.

- Sundre and Wainwright are two communities that have organized emergency transportation for abused women and their children.

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Did You Know?

- **Understanding Criminal Prosecution of Child Sexual Abuse with Specific Reference to Bill C15**, a paper written for the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse by Catherine Stewart, M.S.W. and Nicholas Bala, L.L.M., contains information about legal matters, advocacy measures, implementation strategies and relevant case law. The paper is available for \$5.00 from the institute, 25 Spadina Road, Toronto, M5R 2S9.

- The Council of National Youth-serving Organizations and the Canadian Council on Children and Youth have launched a major training project about child sexual abuse. Materials are being developed and planning is un-

derway to train volunteer youth workers about their role in the prevention of sexual abuse. For more information, contact Susan Thomas Gilman at C.C.C.Y., 2211 Riverside, Ste. 14, Ottawa, Ontario, K1H 7X5.

- In August, 1988, in an address to the Canadian Bar Association, the Minister of Justice outlined his agenda to begin the **reform of sentencing in Canada**. The main objective of this reform is the removal of unwarranted disparity in sentences across the country. To express views and receive more information, contact the Minister of Justice, Department of Justice, 239 Wellington St., Ottawa, K1A 0H8; (613) 957-4714.

- The Honourable Connie Ostrman, Minister of Alberta Social Services, hosted a meeting last October of representatives of groups from across the province interested in the issue of **elder abuse**. Participants described their activities and were told about resources available to them from the provincial and federal governments.

- On January 16, 1989, the Edmonton Committee on Abuse of the Elderly, in cooperation with Catholic Social Services, launched a **24-hour phone line to serve local elderly persons** who might be experiencing various forms of abuse and neglect. Assistance in the form of home visits, referrals and follow-up is offered to callers.

Community News

Edmonton

The Edmonton area was privileged to have two unique presentations during Family Violence Prevention Month. The **St. Albert** Interfaith Council sponsored a drama and panel discussion in a local church. They focused on questions related to the Christian church's response to wife abuse.

The **Strathcona County** Inter-agency Steering Committee on Family Violence Awareness sponsored a variety of activities. The highlight of these activities was a collective drama entitled "Under Broken Wings," consisting of 30 vignettes depicting various types of family violence. They played to packed houses at four performances and after each, a panel of experts answered questions. Plans are underway to present the drama in Edmonton. A video tape is being prepared, copies of which will be available for borrowing.

Central

Two organizations in **Red Deer** are developing a broadly-based approach to meeting the developmental and protection needs of children. The Children's Council of Red Deer, formed two and a half years ago, provides information, acts as an advocate for children, and attempts to coordinate efforts and promote communication among agencies designed to meet the needs of children. The Preventive Child Welfare Project started in 1986 as a task force with a mandate to identify problems affecting families and ways of preventing family crises. It concluded that poor parenting skills and family breakdown are the most serious problems affecting the well-being of children. Following publication of the task force report, a project manager, Derryn Yeomans, was hired to implement recommendations and work with existing agencies to help improve services. Both organizations joined to celebrate

Children's Week in Red Deer, November 6 through November 12.

The **Stettler** Society for the Prevention of Family Violence used funds from the federal S.E.E.D. program to hire a researcher last summer to study family violence awareness, education and service needs in the Stettler area. Agency representatives and the public were surveyed. The study revealed that there is a general lack of awareness and understanding about the problem and too few treatment and counselling resources available to the abuser and the abused. The researcher, Tracey Kehler, noted that although inter-agency coordination is good, more resources are needed. She concluded her report with the reminder that family violence is a problem that needs to be addressed by everyone and that community action is the key to solving the problem.

Calgary

The Kerby Centre, a service centre for seniors in **Calgary**, discovered after a year-long study that about one-third of the seniors seeking advice at the centre's social work department were victims of some kind of abuse. To respond to this serious problem, the centre is proposing that a network involving police, social workers, lawyers and women's shelters be set up to help abused and neglected seniors in the Calgary area. "There is no other project like this in Canada," says Annette McCullough, head of the centre's social work department.

Northeast

Alberta Social Services is providing easily accessible help for children in two schools in **Fort McMurray**. A social worker is available in Peter Pond Community School and St. John's Junior High School, a half day a week. "If the kids want to come and see me, if they have something they

just want to talk about or something they want information about, they come to me," says St. John's worker, Sheila Halarewich. Brian Herperger, the other worker, says, "You usually find out there is more behind a student not doing his or her homework. Often the children are responding to something that has happened in the family or the community. It may be physical, sexual, or alcohol abuse, and it is the reason they are having problems. Once you start to understand the reasons behind the problem, you can start working with the child."

Northwest

The 1988 Provincial Youth Conference was held in **Grande Prairie**, November 4 to 6. Suicide and child abuse were the primary topics of discussion for the almost 300 young people who attended from across the province. How to develop and maintain peer support groups was also examined. Sharon Batts, who recorded "Dear Mr. Jesus", a song about child abuse, was a special guest at the conference.

South

Last fall, 150 people attended a two-part invitational conference on child sexual abuse in **Medicine Hat**. Every aspect of the problem was examined, including investigation, effects on the victim and the role and process of the legal system. A perpetrator told his story and the participants heard from the mother of a victim. Other featured speakers were Dr. Michael Scoletti of Missoula, Montana, who works with perpetrators, and Dick Ramone, a retired police officer who gave a powerful description of a victim's point of view. Marg McCully of the Medicine Hat District Office of Social Services said the conference generated some excellent discussion and has enhanced the networking among professionals in the area.

Book Review

Growing Strong: Women in Agriculture prepared for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women in November, 1987.

This book is a collection of articles which describe the conditions and roles of women working in agriculture and the challenges they face in their attempts to become visible in the family, in the community, and in a national context.

The first article, by Ginette Busque, describes how the collective needs of Canadian women are also central to the concerns of women who live on farms. These concerns include access to services for women who are victims of family violence; access to training programs and child care; and the adop-

tion of measures to promote health and safety on farms. The article points out the cost to society of ignoring the needs of farm women. The author goes on to discuss a number of initiatives that are being tried in various parts of the country. Included are several related to family violence in rural areas.

The other three articles in the book examine issues related to the legal and economic recognition of farm women's work, women as non-family farm workers and measuring women's contribution to Canadian agriculture.

The book is available free of charge from:

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
220 - 4th Avenue S.E.
Room 270
Box 1390, Station M
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 2L6
Phone: 292-6668

Seeking Solutions

Continued from page 2

- The communities of Vegreville, St. Paul and Minburn-Vermilion have each set up a committee of persons concerned about abuse of vulnerable adults, particularly elderly and handicapped people. An umbrella organization, the Organization for the Protection of Abused Adults, has been incorporated. For information about affiliation, contact Gloria Leraand, Vegreville Health Unit.

- The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters held a workshop on "Battered Women in Rural Alberta" last June in conjunction with their annual general meeting. A summary of the presentations made at that workshop, including the talk given by Linda MacLeod, the author of "Battered But Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Battering in Canada" is included in the July, 1988 issue of the council's newsletter. Copies are available at cost from the council office, #340, 9912 - 106 Street, Edmonton, T5K 1C5, telephone (403) 429-9923.

New Publication

"Short Term Crisis Accommodation Projects: Issues to Consider When Developing Safe Home Networks and Satellite Accommodation Projects."

This new publication is intended as a vehicle for information and discussion. It focuses on two particular approaches to providing crisis accommodation — safe homes and satellites. Included is a discussion of the relative merits of each and issues to consider when developing any short-term crisis accommodation. Suggestions about possible service components related to each of the two approaches are given. The paper concludes by pointing out the need for a comprehensive array of services, regardless of the program model chosen. Available free of charge from the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence.

Calendar of Events

April 4 - 7 Toronto

Advanced Level Training for Treatment of Adolescent Sex Offenders

Contact: Canadian Child Welfare Association
#401, 2211 Riverside Drive
Ottawa K1H 7X5
(613) 738-0697

April 14 - 15 High River, Alberta

First Annual Southern Alberta Conference on the Prevention of Family Violence

Contact: Sunbow Society for the Prevention of Family Violence
P.O. Box 3989
High River, Alberta T0L 1B0
Phone: (403) 652-4971

May 11 - 12 Vancouver

Family Violence: National and International Perspectives on Research, Policy and Practice

Contact: Public Policy Program, Continuing Studies
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6
(604) 291-3853/4565

May 12 - 13 Vancouver, B.C.

Abuse in Families: A Strategic Therapy Workshop

Contact: Knowledge Unlimited
138 Yonge St. South
Aurora, Ontario L4G 1M6
(416) 489-1455

May 25 - 26 Edmonton

Sexual Assault and Abuse of People with Disabilities: An International Conference

Contact: Severe Disabilities Program
Educational Psychology
6 - 102 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2G6
(403) 492-1142

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